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4

ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE LECTURE
SHAKESPEARE'S PUNCTUATION

By P. ALEXANDER

Read 25 April 1945

‘NO man forgets his original trade: the rights of nations, and of kings, sink into question: grammar, if grammarians discuss them.’ Without arrogating to oneself the honourable title of grammarian, one may plead some extenuating circumstances in choosing with all the world of Shakespeare before one such a bleak byway as his punctuation. When the British Academy laid upon me the honourable task of delivering the Shakespeare Lecture for 1945, I could not dare to prophesy that this would indeed be the year of victory. As I sat down to write there was sounding in my ears the dreadful note of preparation that preceded the great assault by the combined American and British forces on the embattled coast of Normandy. And in the days that followed the success of this daring venture, who could keep his thoughts from the desperate struggle to make the landing good except by concentrating on the most mechanical tasks to his hand? The men who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake had to be free or die—the only adequate commentary for such a season was being made by those in the forefront of the battle. It is of course the same men who fight the battle in every generation. ‘They were’ said a contemporary of Shakespeare,

They were young gentlemen, yeomen, and yeomen’s sons and artificers of the most brave sort, such as did disdain to pilfer and steal, but went as voluntary to serve of a gaiety and jowalty of mind, all which kind of people are the force and flower of a kingdom.

They are the same to-day and will be the same to-morrow while England’s glory lasts. From those who could do no more than send their hearts with them, you will be the last to expect the eloquent words and the felicity of criticism that have hitherto given the annual Shakespeare Lecture its interest and reputation. That is why though I now stand in what not the least critical of my countrymen described as ‘the flour of cities all’, delivered at last from the siege it has so stubbornly resisted, some words of an English poet may be necessary to restore you to the temper

in which you can bring yourselves to listen to this discourse; for

Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
 Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
 Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
 Dreams, 'Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!'—
 Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
 To the old solitary nothingness

so you must forgo the thoughts that the very name of Shakespeare inspires in these days—though you may not remain long contented or indeed awake.

'Criticism apart from interpretation does not exist' said the late Professor Housman. This is true of all criticism; but Professor Housman was speaking of textual criticism, and it is in this restricted sense that I would, for the moment, remind you of his precept. Recension is impossible if the critic cannot choose between variant readings; and how is he to choose if he does not understand his author's meaning? In Emendation it is, if possible, more obvious: you cannot even tell what needs emendation if you do not follow the drift of your author's argument. These are truths Housman thought worth repeating. Speaking of emendation he said:

The merits essential to a correction are those without which it cannot be true, and closeness to the MSS. is not one of them; the indispensable things are fitness to the context and propriety to the genius of the author. The question whether the error presupposed was great or small is indeed a question to be asked, but it is the last question. With vulgar judges it is the first, though usually the last as well. This detail is their favourite criterion, because it can be discerned, or they think it can, by a bodily sense, without disturbing the slumbers of the intellect.¹

His pages—those I am familiar with, those from which the unlearned, so he said, hoped to extract a low enjoyment—are full of such warnings and threats. Indeed, he treated the devotees of the 'palaeographical method', which he called 'the delight of tiros and the scorn of critics', with something of the violence his Shropshire Lad reserved for his Creator.

'Fitness to the context and propriety to the genius of the author'—with these few precepts characterized in the memory, or, since there is something almost minatory in them, written for the mind's eye upon the plaster of the wall by the fingers of a man's hand, that of the ghost of the great scholar himself shall we say, as a MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN, let us come, or try

¹ Introduction to *Manilius*, bk. v, p. xxxv.

to come, to judgement on some of the mysteries in the commas and colons of Shakespeare's text.

Opening a modern and popular edition of *Macbeth* one may read at Act II, sc. ii:

Will all great Neptune's Ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No: this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one, red.

Some of you will at once object that the last line should read:

Making the green one red.

where 'one red' means 'total gules'. But the editor can plead that in the only authoritative text of *Macbeth*, that of the First Folio, there is a comma after 'one'. And if I may continue to speak for him, he might add, though no doubt more forcibly than I can, something like this. When the early eighteenth-century editors came to the study of Shakespeare they had the ideas of their age of what fitness to the context and propriety to the genius of their author implied. Into what bogs this will o' the wispish illumination sometimes tempted them is well illustrated in Pope's treatment of the passage now in question. For all his poetic genius and sharp wit Pope could not accept as genuine what every schoolboy now confidently quotes, in his need to satisfy examiners in English, as the quintessential Shakespeare. Spurious passages were degraded by Pope to the bottom of his page where the line

The multitudinous seas incarnadine¹

finds a humble position; and Pope restored in the text the words he thought Shakespeare must have used:

No, this my hand will rather
Make the green ocean red.

Of course Pope was far too intelligent a man not to see that such changes carried with them important implications about the history of the text he was editing, and he was as solicitous as any modern editor to account for the errors he proposed to remove. Bentley, when he rewrote *Paradise Lost*, tried to reassure his startled readers by reconstructing for them the circumstances in which the poem was transmitted to paper. He pictured for them the blind poet dictating to a scribe whose wandering fancy

¹ He put 'sea' for 'seas'.

had embroidered on the lucid yet often prosaic words that Bentley now restored to the text. The great critic took account of at least one fact that could not be questioned. Milton had to dictate his poem to a scribe. So Pope took account of one undoubted fact in the transmission of Shakespeare's plays—they passed through the hands of his actor colleagues. And he then constructed a story that squared with his judgement of his author. Shakespeare was himself, Pope thought, an untaught genius; but the actors who were his literary executors had no genius to protect their ignorance. The quick and sensitive Pope indeed felt that there might be detected in this assumption a general criticism of the educational standards of actors, and hastened to add that this unfavourable view was confined to the Elizabethan actors, about whom he knew nothing, and did not reflect on the gentlemen of the stage of his own day, who still had it in their power to make themselves better known to him. These actors took the place of Bentley's scribe as the whipping boy for the critic's castigations. In this way the eighteenth century tried to reconcile its respect for Shakespeare with its critical conscience.

When poets found it necessary to rewrite the text itself, it was natural that the punctuation should receive short shrift. 'In restoring the author's works to their integrity, I have considered the punctuation as wholly in my power;' said Dr. Johnson 'for what could be their care of colons and commas, who corrupted words and sentences.' And long after editors had given up rewriting the poetry of the plays the punctuation was still left beyond the pale of critical discussion. 'In many places,' declare the first Cambridge editors, Clark and Glover,

In many places, we may almost say that a complete want of points would mislead us less than the punctuation of the Folios. The consequence is, that our punctuation is very little dependent upon the Folios and Quartos, but generally follows the practice which has taken possession of the text of Shakespeare, under the arrangement of the best editors, from Pope to Dyce and Staunton.

Then came the Revolution—in this particular realm of scholarship, long prepared for and carried through, like the typical English revolution, by devoted students of the past. The eighteenth-century editors, like all good scholars, had gradually accumulated the evidence that was to correct their own assumptions—it is a far cry from Rowe to Malone; and the nineteenth century put it all in a more easily digested and

comprehensive form. Thus were laid the solid foundations for the new Shakespearean world of the twentieth century.

The main doctrine finding expression in this revolution is that the printed texts of Shakespeare's plays are much nearer the author's manuscript than the early editors could bring themselves to believe. In 1902 Sir Sidney Lee in his *Preface* to the Clarendon Facsimile of the First Folio summed up the pre-revolutionary scheme of things, and in 1909 Professor Pollard, in his *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos*, was able to ask on what evidence Sir Sidney Lee had based his conclusions. The question was a rhetorical one, for no answer was possible. The avalanche long impending had moved at last, and Sir Sidney Lee was left without a leg to stand on. His cries could still be heard ascending from footnotes and appendices—for he was a stout mountaineer—but for all critical purposes his views were dead and buried.

The change in the contours of the approach to the problem was here seen in its most catastrophic form, but was everywhere perceptible. No one could any longer believe that the actors had written

The multitudinous seas incarnadine

and most people were agreed that Shakespeare had not caught Heminge and Condell composing the Porter scene in *Macbeth*, and 'with the remaining ink of a pen otherwise employed just interpolated it with the sentence, "I'll devil-porter it no further" and what follows to "bonfire"'. Pope had degraded the whole scene to the bottom of the page. Coleridge was for putting a line or two back into the text. Who now doubts that the scene must stand there in its entirety? It was now possible to take a more rigorous view of the factors governing the transmission of the text, and to those who kept on repeating what they had heard about the multiplication of transcript after transcript Professor Pollard replied with his famous 'printed from the author's autograph manuscript'. To summarize here the work of the school of critics who had made this conclusion a scholarly proposition and who had helped to prepare for it and have developed and refined on it is unnecessary. Dr. Greg, the late Dr. McKerrow, Professor Dover Wilson—their names need no more than a grateful mention here; their work has spoken for itself.

As a consequence, most of the faults that were once laid at the door of the printing-house or the green-room are now more naturally traced to the very desk at which Shakespeare himself worked. There was for example his handwriting. The compositors were only doing another day's work when they tackled

a manuscript from the poet's pen. Their task was no doubt a shade more troublesome than usual, for the handwriting, in some ways the result of a sound old-fashioned education, was very different from that of the sweet Roman hand that Shakespeare at times admired in others. Had the compositors and printers known that their work was to come under the scrutiny of Dr. Greg or Sir Edmund Chambers, they might have used even worse language than I fancy I can hear ascending from the office of James Roberts or Nicholas Okes; but at the same time they might have made the extra effort that would have deprived these distinguished scholars of some at least of the most distracting but, I cannot help thinking, some of the happiest and most satisfactory moments of their lives. As it is we may accept, provisionally, as an estimate of the printers' work on Shakespeare's copy a testimonial issued by the inquirers of the Folger Library at Washington (where 74, or is it now 75, copies of Jaggard's Folio lie under regular examination) to one of Jaggard's proof-readers—'The proof reader was moderately careful but not meticulous in his work.' Even some of the very worst texts provide evidence that special efforts had gone to their production. In the First Quarto of *King Lear*, the stop press corrections alone cover 'fifty passages containing from one to thirteen changes each'.¹ The proof-reader came back again and sometimes yet again to his copy in the hope of deciphering it. He obviously believed he had the correct words there if only he could make them out; and he tried hard. If we accept, for the moment, Dr. Greg's judgement that he was working not from Shakespeare's manuscript but from a transcript of a shorthand report of the play, then the reporter must have been for his day a marvellous shorthand writer, but when he came to make his translation into longhand he must have written as difficult a hand as Shakespeare's; and their spelling and punctuation must have been almost identical in style. That there were stormy scenes when this tempest-swept play first went to press the First Quarto provides some evidence. That Shakespeare did not look in to still the storm is natural. He was agonizing over *Coriolanus*, or relaxing at the wedding of his daughter, Susanna. But if it was a pirate's work the reporter might have had time to help with his handwriting, for he does not seem to have been employed again in such ventures. But returning to Dr. Willoughby's certificate to the proof-reader, as endorsed the other month by Mr. Hinman, and accepting it

¹ *The Variants in the First Quarto of 'King Lear'*, by W. W. Greg, p. 13.

as a general testimonial to the printers' work, we can hardly now venture to say 'the punctuation is wholly in our power'. A reasonably careful printer may have set up some at least of Shakespeare's stops if there were any such indications in his manuscript.

The editor of *Macbeth*, for whom I have so far ventured to speak, might now turn and tell those who question his version that he finds a comma after 'one' in his author and sees no reason for changing it.

There is no resource open to us then but to examine the point at issue in as critical a spirit as we can command.

We all, at times, feel ourselves capable of taking the first step in criticism—a consideration of the reading from the point of view of what Hort and Westcott call Intrinsic Probability, which includes 'conformity to grammar and congruity to the purport of the rest of the sentence and of the larger context; to which may rightly be added congruity to the usual style of the author and to his matter in other passages'.¹ This is but another way of saying, fitness to the context and propriety to the genius of the author. Still, as we wish in this matter to do all in our power 'to read attentively, think correctly, omit no relevant consideration, and repress self-will', we must consider our choice in the light of what Hort and Westcott call Transcriptional Probability. 'Transcriptional Probability is not directly or properly concerned with the relative excellence of rival readings, but merely with the relative fitness of each for explaining the existence of the others.'

Here we come on the so-called canons of criticism, such as 'Prefer the harder reading', for we can all see how a scribe copying an unusual word might make it into one more familiar to himself, especially if the two words are similar in outline. But in matters of punctuation this is a more delicate task; and leaving Transcriptional Probability for consideration on the return journey to the text, let us pass to the help to be obtained from a study of the Internal Evidence of Documents. This demands a study of the general characteristics of the text in any document as learned directly from the document itself by a continuous study of the whole, in an attempt to assess the definite characteristics of the document as a witness to what it purports to tell us. And here Hort and Westcott lay down their first principle in establishing a text: Knowledge of Documents

¹ Introduction to *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. The text revised by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, p. 20.

should precede final Judgement upon Readings. Of course knowledge of any document as a whole has to be built up from judgements on individual passages. 'If nobody' as Housman says 'can tell a true reading from a false reading, it follows of necessity that nobody can tell a truthful MS. from a lying MS.' But we must consider the individual readings together, systematically. From such a comparison we hope to arrive at some helpful knowledge of the habits of the scribe or author. But a study of documents inevitably raises questions about their pedigree. Just as individual readings in a document were to be considered in relation to every other reading in that document, so documents themselves are to be considered together and linked, where possible, as in a family—branches in a tree of genealogical transmission. And here Hort and Westcott enunciate their second leading principle: All trustworthy restoration of corrupted texts is founded on the study of their history.

Should any of you say, on the spur of the moment, that the critical procedure outlined by Hort and Westcott, though applicable to the study of classical texts and to those of the New Testament, is beside the point when we come to consider the Quartos and Folios of Shakespeare's works, let me remind you of the words in which Hort and Westcott anticipate this objection:

The leading principles of textual criticism are identical for all writings whatever. Differences in application arise only from differences in the amount, variety, and quality of evidence: no method is ever inapplicable except through defectiveness of evidence.

Indeed, the important advance in recent years in the criticism of Shakespeare's text has been made possible by the more systematic application of these very principles. The study of its history has been advanced by a study both of the direct and of the collateral evidence bearing on its transmission. In our zeal, however, to be systematic, or what is called 'scientific', we must not forget the first stages of the inquiry, the reagent labelled 'fitness to the context and propriety to the genius of the author', the magic bottle, to mix the metaphor a little, from which comes, like the genie in the *Arabian Nights*, the critical questionings that wrap us as in a cloud and that may, if we command the necessary charm, stand before us as the family tree of our text, so that we can distinguish the good branches from the bad and confirm our judgement on the fruit by our other senses. As in all criticism we strive, in the words of another great critic, to reunite our Understandings to our Instinct.

All this anticipates two objections that might be raised to a further consideration of the passage in *Macbeth*. Some might say, but you would not: the comma stands after 'one' in the only authoritative text we have; it makes sense and should therefore stand. Here in simple form is the critical fallacy that Housman in his invaluable lesson for beginners in textual criticism puts first among the errors we must avoid.

Open a modern recension of a classic, turn to the preface, and there you may almost count on finding, in Latin or German or English, some words like these: 'I have made it my rule to follow *a* wherever possible, and only where its readings are patently erroneous have I had recourse to *b* or *c* or *d*.' No scholar of eminence, even in the present age, has ever enunciated such a principle . . . to blurt it out as a maxim is an indiscretion which they leave to their unreflecting imitators, who formulate the rule without misgiving and practise it with conscious pride.

Either *a* is the source of *b* and *c* and *d* or it is not. If it is, then never in any case should recourse be had to *b* or *c* or *d*. If it is not, then the rule is irrational; for it involves the assumption that wherever *a*'s scribes made a mistake they produced an impossible reading. Three minutes' thought would suffice to find this out; but thought is irksome and three minutes is a long time.

Now I seem to remember reading the words: I have made it my rule to follow the Quarto or Folio text wherever it makes sense—or words to that effect—in not a few introductions to Shakespeare's text in recent years. Fortunately the practice of these critics has almost always been superior to their precepts; and we must not allow the fact that the printer put a comma after 'one' to disable what critical faculties we possess. It does make sense, but the question we are asking is, Does it make the sense Shakespeare intended?

To the opposite objection that though the printers may have had Shakespeare's manuscript before them they often made mistakes and that there is no need to fuss about a comma, the answer is that this also is true, but the immediate question is the evidence about the placing of this particular comma.

It is at this point then that one should focus all the evidence from intrinsic and transcriptional probability, from the internal evidence of the document and from the relevant evidence in documents of similar family descent. This is 'to hear all the evidence continuously'. Each fact should find a place in a system of mutually attracted units. You alter the centre of gravity of the earth when you move a stone, so our decision on

any detail affects the whole body of our knowledge, which in turn by its mass affects this or that particular.

Whether such a programme is within my powers need not, fortunately, be asked since your patience would not admit of the trial, and all I shall venture to do is to outline some of the relevant evidence, drawn however from a circle of texts that lies nearer the centre of the whole question of Shakespeare's punctuation than does the group to which the First Folio version of *Macbeth* belongs.

Turning from *Macbeth* to a passage equally famous in its own kind in *Romeo and Juliet*, that in which Mercutio is killed, one finds a similar difficulty about the punctuation. Romeo in his distress at seeing his friend wounded says, according to the earliest text with good authority behind it:

Courage man, the hurt cannot be much

and Mercutio replies:

No tis not so deepe as a well, nor so wide as a Church doore, but tis enough, twill serve

and his last words are:

a plague a both your houses,
They haue made wormes mcate of me,
I haue it, and soundly, to your houses.

The Second Quarto puts a comma after 'soundly' and spells 'to' with one 'o'; so that taken at its present face value the passage would seem to mean: I have it and soundly, and then Mercutio's exhortation to his companions to go home. Though one modern editor has adopted the Quarto punctuation, the almost universal choice is for something quite different. The First Folio omits the comma after 'soundly', but the Folio version is largely a reprint of the 1609 reprint of the Quarto, and as this reprint omits the comma the Folio's omission need have no significance. But editors read:

I have it,
And soundly too. Your houses!

where 'to' becomes 'too' and goes with 'soundly'; and 'Your houses!' is Mercutio's parting objurgation. This is very different from the punctuation of the only authoritative text; and yet it is agreed by the best judges that the printer of the Second Quarto had a manuscript in Shakespeare's hand before him.

Still you may say—there were accidents in the badly lighted printing-houses of the Elizabethans, and for that and other

reasons bad patches. Fix therefore, if possible, the object of attack so that some decision becomes inevitable.

A third passage, as famous as the other two, meets this demand by putting the pistol to our heads as it were and asking

Under which king Bezonian? Speak or die.

Your decision on this passage will carry with it implications that will indicate what your final judgement on the punctuation as a whole should be, if you aim at critical consistency.

In the course of his first reunion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet, according to most editors, says:

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!

This is what he said till Professor Dover Wilson edited the text. But Professor Dover Wilson, no longer regarding the punctuation as wholly in his power, found what he considered a very different punctuation in the Second Quarto of the play and felt bound by the very convictions that started him off on his editorial labours to follow it. For the Second Quarto is according to the best opinion straight from Shakespeare's own manuscript—handed to the printer that he might publish a version according to the 'true and perfect copy', as the title-page informs us, to replace a pirated version issued in 1603. If any version of a play by Shakespeare is printed from a manuscript in the dramatist's own hand the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* is that text; and Professor Dover Wilson, the true child of the revolution, seized upon this invaluable document as an ancient charter of liberties, much as Sir Edward Coke in the struggle leading to the great English revolution took his stand on Magna Carta. But as that, to the layman, mysterious charter of King John needed liberal interpretation before it could serve the Parliamentary party in 1634, so the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* has required a good deal of editing before it could be presented to us as a vindication of the new views on Shakespeare's text.

Let me say at once I am for Professor Dover Wilson—as I am for Sir Edward Coke, though in fairness to Charles I it should be said that I would a thousand times rather have listened to him on Shakespeare, could I have enjoyed such a privilege, than to Sir Edward Coke. Yet in the detail we are considering, the punctuation, I venture to read the ancient documents in a slightly different sense from Professor Dover Wilson's. But

though I venture on such criticism—and even were my criticism in this detail approved, and it is far from that, I would be of the same mind—I still think Professor Dover Wilson will be judged by aftertimes as the representative editor of the new movement, and any blemishes in his text regarded as honourable scars not unbecoming in a pioneer, though not to be commended in those who follow a blazed trail.

The punctuation of the Second Quarto is slight—or light, the term preferred by Professor Dover Wilson that at once engages your sympathies on its behalf. There are, for instance, none of the exclamation marks of the Folio text:

What [a] peece of worke is a man,
how noble in reason, how infinit in faculties, in forme and moouing,
how expresse and admirable in action, how like an Angell in apprehension,
how like a God: the beautie of the world; the paragon of Annimales;

For the exclamation marks we have mostly commas, and, more important, the phrases taken together in the Folio version

in forme and moouing, how expresse and admirable
in action, how like an Angell
in apprehension, how like a God

are here each split in two by a comma, while no stop of any kind separates the first from the second and the second from the third. Professor Dover Wilson therefore divides them at the commas, and rearranges the phrases:

how infinite in faculties, in form and moving,
how express and admirable in action,
how like an angel in apprehension,
how like a god:

And he argues that not only is this how the Quarto punctuates it but that read this way it makes better sense. He too appeals to the context and the genius of his author for support.

But he also feels it necessary to account for the very different punctuation of the Folio. The Folio version with its notes of exclamation he would dismiss as 'a piece of rhetoric, in which we can hear the voice of Burbage'. Now this is an old-fashioned type of theorizing that should be allowed to lapse with the conclusions formerly drawn from it. The actors were once the villains of the piece; and here is Professor Dover Wilson treating them no more civilly than Pope. Why should we suppose that Burbage delivered these lines in any other way than that indicated by Shakespeare himself, for Shakespeare was obviously

complete master of his stage by the time he wrote *Hamlet*, as the lines spoken by Burbage himself to his colleagues during this very play make clear? The bibliographer must look elsewhere for the explanation.

One of the real difficulties about the editorial procedure adopted by Heminge and Condell is focused in this very difference between the Second Quarto and First Folio texts of *Hamlet*. In the First Folio Heminge and Condell, very rightly, as Professor Pollard has taught us, reprinted certain Quarto texts—for example, the Second Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, which like the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* had replaced a version that did little credit to the author and his company. Why then did they not reprint the Second Quarto of *Hamlet*?

The parallel problem of the relation of the Quarto and Folio texts of *2 Henry IV* has been well treated in Professor Shaaber's recent and admirable edition of that play. In dealing with this question he has had the help of Professor Quincy Adams, and here is a bald summary of that distinguished scholar's conclusions. The First Quarto of *2 Henry IV* was printed from Shakespeare's own papers; but Heminge and Condell felt that a version with a slightly more 'literary' flavour would do Shakespeare more justice in the eyes of the reading public of their time. The Quarto contains the oaths and colloquial turns that delighted the first audiences at the Theatre. The oaths ought to go because of the Act of Abuses; and the scribe who made the version also smoothed out some of the turns in the dialogue that might sound a little crude in the reading. The Folio version is in substance a faithful one—indeed, it includes much not printed in the Quarto—but in certain details it has been edited, and these details include the punctuation. Finally, Professor Quincy Adams suggests that the scribe who made the transcript was Ralph Crane, whom Professor F. P. Wilson discovered and whose work Professor R. C. Bald has made more familiar to us. That the hand of this accomplished scribe can be traced elsewhere in the First Folio there can be little doubt.

It is on similar lines that a solution must be sought for the First Folio version of *Hamlet*. Heminge and Condell may well have felt that so important a play as *Hamlet* required the best treatment they could give it. For their care and pains we must be grateful—though we may now prefer the earlier and untouched version. Here too the punctuation was revised. Of the prose scenes of *2 Henry IV* in Quarto Professor Shaaber observes that the punctuation makes them almost unintelligible to the

reader. The Folio punctuation of 2 *Henry IV* as of *Hamlet* is very different. On the punctuation of the Folio as a whole I quote the observations of the late Dr. McKerrow—very different you will note from those of Clark and Glover:

In the majority of texts, at any rate in those that are printed from the First Folio, it will, I think, be found that though the punctuation may at first seem somewhat strange, and though it is undoubtedly less regular than we are accustomed to nowadays, it really presents no more difficulty to the reader than the old spelling does, while it often suggests the way in which a speech is intended to be uttered more clearly than does the more 'logical' punctuation of the modern texts.¹

And his judgement may be reinforced by what Professor Quincy Adams has to say on this matter in the Introduction to his edition of *Hamlet*:

I have laboured hard to supply a punctuation that may aid the reader in a dramatic interpretation of the lines. Here I have availed myself, in so far as was possible, of the actors' punctuation as represented in the Folio; for often that punctuation nicely reveals the way in which a speech was delivered.²

It is true I cannot help hearing, at the back of my mind as it were, the words of Professor Kittredge—to whom every student of Chaucer and Shakespeare will give an attentive ear—in his *Preface* to one of the very best punctuated versions of Shakespeare's text:

Theorists have dallied with the idea that what is called 'dramatic punctuation' may be discovered in the old texts; but this theory has had its day.

While I cannot think that the late Professor Pollard, or Dr. McKerrow, or Professor Quincy Adams, or Professor Dover Wilson, is rightly described as a 'theorist', I believe there is a point in the assertion which Professor Kittredge would now make somewhat differently; and I here avoid the term 'dramatic punctuation'.

The punctuation then of the First Folio cannot be ascribed to Burbage's bad style, or to the actors' indifference to Shakespeare's intentions, or to the scribe's incompetence. The six notes of exclamation from which Professor Dover Wilson shrinks are not the rhetoric of Burbage, but the inevitable stops in an edition for the reader. Where shall we find severer judges than

¹ *Prolegomena for the Oxford Shakespeare*, by Ronald B. McKerrow, p. 42.

² *Hamlet*, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams, p. vi.

H. W. and F. G. Fowler, who sit in judgement on English usage with the terrifying impartiality of a Minos or a Rhadamanthus? 'The stop' they say, speaking of the exclamation mark,

The stop should be used, with one exception, only after real exclamations. Real exclamations include (1) the words recognized as interjections, as *alas*, (2) fragmentary expressions that are not complete sentences, . . . and (3) complete statements that contain an exclamatory word, as:

What a piece of work is man!—B.¹

The verdict must be on this count at least an honourable acquittal for Heminge and Condell unless Professor Dover Wilson charges them under some earlier statute.

But does the acquittal of the First Folio imply the condemnation of the Second Quarto in this particular? Professor Dover Wilson pleads that the Second Quarto makes better sense. He objects to the Folio phrase 'in form and moving how express and admirable' on the ground that even the *Oxford Dictionary* has to give 'express' a nonce-use to link it with 'form'. The *O.E.D.* says it means 'well-framed or modelled': Professor Dover Wilson that it means 'purposive', to go with 'action'. The word 'express', however, comes from the Latin *exprimo*, and the past participle means something pressed out as the stamp from the die, the figure on the wax from the seal; so that its early meanings are naturally linked with the idea of form. 'This is' says Holinshed, quoting Sir Thomas More,

This is the father's owne figure, this is his owne countenance, the verie print of his visage, the sure undoubted image, the plaine expresse likenesse of that noble duke.

Of what then does Hamlet say man's form is the expression? He answers this in his description of his own father:

A combination and a form indeed
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man.

Then Professor Dover Wilson argues that to a thinking Elizabethan angels were discarnate spirits whose only form of action was 'apprehension', and he quotes Aquinas. But he does not tell us what Aquinas would have thought of the phrase with which his own reading concludes—'how like a god'. In the system of Aquinas there was, I believe, room for only one god. Whereas the man who could say

Where every god did seem to set his seal

¹ *The King's English*, by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, pp. 266–7.

might very well say

In apprehension how like a god.

The Elizabethans were no deep students of Aquinas; and Shakespeare and his audience obviously took a more popular and pictorial view of angels than that held by the scholar whom his contemporaries called the 'Angelic Doctor'. Angels in Shakespeare are usually feminine. 'If not divine,' says the love-struck Proteus of his beloved,

If not divine,
Yet let her be a principality

and we need no deep inquiry into the relative positions of

Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers

to grasp his meaning. In the chat about Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* you will find the expression 'she-angel'. But if these are not thinking Elizabethans, read what the Ghost says to Hamlet:

But virtue, as it never will be mov'd,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd, &c.

If a being from the other world uses such expressions, and if 'she-angels' were intelligible to the Elizabethans, then the phrase

In action how like an angel

was no more nonsense to them than it is to us.

So far it has been mostly a question of Intrinsic Probability, but Hort and Westcott ask us to consider a document in its family connexions. The Second Quarto of *Hamlet* belongs to the important group of texts that come directly from Shakespeare's own manuscript. Accepting only such texts as have been approved by Dr. Greg and Sir Edmund Chambers as belonging to this group, let us ask if *Hamlet* has any outstanding features in punctuation that at once mark, and are to be explained by, its close kinship with the other members of the family.

I have already quoted Dr. McKerrow's judgement on the Folio punctuation. In the edition his death interrupted in so untimely a fashion he had intended to reproduce the original punctuation. But he made this qualification:

There is, however, one type of irregular punctuation which I have felt bound to alter, namely those rather numerous cases in which a clause is separated by a major stop, such as a semicolon, colon, or full

point, from another to which it logically belongs, while at the same time it is only separated by a comma from one with which it has much less logical connection.¹

I shall call these two features internal and external punctuation respectively; and ask, Where do we find the most remarkable instances of this strong internal and weak, or indeed often non-existent, external punctuation? And the answer is: In those very texts that are judged by the best authorities to have been printed from Shakespeare's own manuscript. Here are some instances from *Coriolanus*, which though a Folio text is of this family.

Martius. [*To Cominius*] Oh! let me clip ye
In Armes as sound, as when I woo'd in heart;
As merry, as when our Nuptiall day was done,
And Tapers burnt to Bedward.

Cominius. [*To Menenius*] his Sword, Deaths stampe,
Where it did marke, it tooke from face to foot:
He was a thing of Blood,

Coriolanus. The fires i' th' lowest hell. Fould in the people:
Call me their Traitor, thou iniurious Tribune.
Within thine eyes sate twenty thousand deaths
In thy hands clutcht: as many Millions in
Thy lying tongue, both numbers. I would say
Thou lyest unto thee, with a voice as free,
As I do pray the Gods.

In spite of the punctuation, you cannot read these passages in any other sense than that in which all the editors have taken them. And what is more important for the present purpose the man who punctuated them can't have been in any doubt, except for a moment perhaps in one place, as to their meaning. Yet Dr. McKerrow would have had to alter the punctuation as he proposed to do 'when it might give a misleading impression of the interrelationship of the various clauses within a sentence'. Professor Dover Wilson has pronounced the punctuation of *Coriolanus* 'on the whole respectable and in places brilliant', but it is thick sown with the type of punctuation which Dr. McKerrow felt compelled to edit. To find instances comparable in number and quality you must go to the First Quarto of *Troilus and Cressida*, the Second of *Romeo and Juliet*, and as we shall see, I trust, to our Quarto of *Hamlet*. Each of these texts has its individual as well as the family characteristics. A member of this family that has been to school in the Folio will differ from

¹ *Prolegomena for the Oxford Shakespeare*, by Ronald B. McKerrow, p. 42.

its less well-groomed Quarto cousin; but the sharp contrast between the internal and external stopping is shown by them all. And I venture to suggest that this characteristic can hardly be attributed to the printers in so many different printing-houses, but is to be traced to Shakespeare himself. Dr. Percy Simpson has shown that the punctuation of the First Folio is not the work of men who had no idea of their business; only, as Professor Bald has said somewhere, Dr. Simpson's illustrations cover all the styles contained in the Folio, and we are at present trying to make some distinction between these styles. But Dr. Simpson's book is a very arsenal of material in reserve.

Though this is a very hasty consideration of the family relationships of the Second Quarto of *Hamlet*, an examination of the Internal Evidence afforded by the document, the Second Quarto, will itself illustrate more fully some of the family virtues and failings.

On this the last lap of the argument, to save your breath and patience, I propose to classify some of the features of its punctuation under headings devised by the late Mr. Alfred E. Thiselton; and I cannot sufficiently acknowledge my debt to his patient and, as I think, fruitful study. He did not, however, publish any specific study of *Hamlet*; so I adapt his findings to my present purpose. His first rule reads:

Where a clause, phrase, or even a word, is interposed in the direct line of construction, a comma is often not found at the beginning of the interposition, but the resumption of the direct line of construction is marked by a comma at its close.

As at 1. i. 35-8,

Barnardo. Last night of all,
When yond same starre thats weastward from the pole,
Had made his course t'illumine that part of heaven
Where now it burns,

You will of course find examples like this in good modern writing—when the subject includes and ends with a defining relative clause, after which an illogical comma (as the Fowlers call it) is sometimes placed. But you will hardly find examples to match the following:

Guy. The Queene your mother in most great affliction of spirit,
hath sent me to you. (III. ii. 323-4)

Ham. what a wounded name
Things standing thus unknowne, shall I leaue behind me?
(v. ii. 355-6)

And many more, where the cardinal rule of modern punctuation, that the verb must not be separated by a stop from such essentially connected elements as the subject, object, or complement, is grossly violated. And even graver forms of this fault, as it seems to-day, are covered by Mr. Thiselton's second rule, really an extension of his first:

Where there is more than one interposition in the direct line of construction, or where an interposition involves intervening punctuation, there is a tendency to mark the resumption of that line by a semi-colon or a colon. Sometimes even an interposition without intervening punctuation is sufficient to support a semi-colon or a colon.

As at III. i. 163,

Oph. And I of Ladies most deict and wretched,
That suckt the honny of his musickt vowes;
Now see that noble and most soueraigne reason
Like sweet bells iangled out of time, and harsh,

The interposition

That suckt the honny of his musickt vowes

is comma'd off as it might be to-day, though no one would now dare to put a semicolon for the second comma as in the Quarto. In the next example the first comma is dropped and the semi-colon stands in its nakedness:

we haue heere writ
To *Norway* Vncle of young *Fortenbrasse*
Who impotent and bedred scarcely heares
Of this his Nephewes purpose; to suppresse
His further gate heerein,

'The Q₂ semicolon' says Professor Dover Wilson 'gives the same effect as the dashes' (which he places after '*Fortenbrasse*' and 'purpose'), but he does not explain how a semicolon is equal to two dashes, nor does he illustrate its use here by its employment elsewhere—and all this Mr. Thiselton does.

There are no instances, I think, in the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* of the semicolon standing alone between the subject and verb. But the period itself is sometimes employed to indicate the resumption of the direct line of construction, as at III. iii. 33:

I'le call upon you ere you go to bed.
And tell you what I know

where the full stop separates the pronoun from 'tell'.

One more instance of this use of the period—there are several

in the Quarto—will show that it obeys a logic still felt in modern punctuation:

Hora. Or if thou hast uphoorded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the wombe of earth
For which they say your spirits oft walke in death.
Speake of it, (I. i. 136-9)

We are all familiar with the habit of inserting a dash after we have built up a complicated introduction to a sentence to mark the appearance of the verb; or sometimes we repeat the subject itself, as we feel the need of some sign-post not provided by normal punctuation. The type of punctuation under Thiselton's two first headings need not therefore seem unreasonable to us. Nor am I arguing that only Shakespeare felt the need to use stops in this way. Such punctuation may be found in any Shakespeare text, but it is very prominent in the members of the family under discussion.

With this internal punctuation we find in the text the frequent neglect of external punctuation. Certain phrases stand punctuated in the midst of an unpunctuated complex. Horatio speaking of the Ghost's disappearance at cockcrow says:

and at his warning
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or ayre
Th' extrauagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine, (I. i. 152-5)

Why should there be a comma after 'fire' and none after 'warning' or 'ayre'? Or again in the opening speech of Claudius:

Now follows that you know *young Fortinbrasse*,
Holding a weake supposall of our worth
Or thinking by our late deare brothers death
Our state to be disioynt, and out of frame
Coleagued with this dreame of his advantage
He hath not faild (I. ii. 17-22)

The only stops here are a comma after *Fortinbrasse*, which actually separates it from the clause with which it goes, and another after 'disioynt'. Or again, to come close to the passage at issue, take the lines with which Hamlet introduces the Player's speech, where he tells how Pyrrhus (II. ii. 477-80)

Hath now this dread and black complexion smeard,
With heraldry more dismall head to foote,
Now is he totall Gules horridly trickt
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sonnes,

Here the phrases

this dread and black complection smeard, With heraldry more
dismall

head to foote, Now is he totall Gules
horridly trickt With blood of fathers,

have internal but no external punctuation. But Professor Dover Wilson does not here hesitate to supply the grammatical stops. He follows the Folio, removes the internal commas, separates the first phrase from the second by no less than a colon, and puts a comma between the second and the third. Yet when he comes to Hamlet's words on man he says: 'if the sense of Q₂ were intended to be identical with the sense of F₁, stops denoting pauses after "admirable" and "Angell" would be absolutely necessary'. But if they are absolutely necessary here, why were they not necessary in the Pyrrhus passage? He supplied them readily enough in that passage; why should we not do the same here? We have not only the warrant of the Folio, but our knowledge of the habits of punctuation revealed in the Second Quarto when that document is studied as a whole for evidence about its own characteristics.

I am not then criticizing Professor Dover Wilson but rather exhorting him to stick to his principles—the critical principles that give his text its importance. Unlike two of his American admirers, Professors Parrott and Craig, the editors of a most useful edition of *Hamlet*—who urge him (shades of Professor Housman!) to retain on principle the Quarto text wherever some sense can be wrung from it (a rule they are careful not to observe themselves)—I ask him to consider each passage in the light of the document as a whole, and to remember the habits of the man who punctuated it.

One last note on these habits by Mr. Thiselton brings us to the very passage in dispute:

When the direct line of construction is displaced by transposition, a comma will sometimes mark the pause necessary for effective delivery.

Knowing something of the habits of this man we are not surprised to find the phrases,

in forme and moouing, how expresse and admirable
in action, how like an Angell
in apprehension, how like a God.

with internal but no external punctuation. Even if we were unable to classify satisfactorily the writer's habits we might yet recognize them. When, however, he begins 'how noble in

reason, how infinit in faculties' and then inverting the construction continues 'in form and moouing, how expresse and admirable' we can not only recognize the habit but classify it too—these are what Dr. Percy Simpson has described as 'commas with inversion'.

The passage in the Quarto is in a notation that (from abundant evidence elsewhere in the document and more abundant evidence in kindred documents) we can see may be transposed into the notation found in the Folio without affecting its meaning. Professor Dover Wilson, like all other editors, again and again makes such transpositions; but here and in a few other passages he not merely denies that the transposition has been correctly made, a fact which as an editor he has a right to establish if he can on intrinsic probability, for there are such errors of transcription, but he goes on to assert that such transpositions cannot be considered legitimate, though elsewhere he finds them not merely convenient but essential. His own practice contradicts his assertion.

Here then is a passage that places you at once on one side or the other; for there can be no explaining away the three commas in a row as a mere error of the printer or as the casual slips of the author's pen. Unless you dismiss as unintelligible the punctuation of the Quarto as a whole you must give some account of them; and if you reject the punctuation of this text, many others, and those closest to Shakespeare's manuscripts, stand condemned with it. The old chaos has returned. The value of Professor Dover Wilson's contribution to the text here comes from his being the first editor to realize this. He has tried to rescue this passage and two or three others by reading a meaning into them that will correspond with what to-day seems the obvious significance of the stops; but his interpretation is not merely intrinsically improbable, it leaves the transcriptional question raised by the Folio pointing unanswered. Further it leaves untouched the many passages in the Quarto and its kindred texts that defy his method of exegesis. Professor Dover Wilson's first and most important contribution has been to see the significance of the problem and not to shirk the issue; his second, second only in importance to the other, his *reductio ad absurdum* of what seemed the most plausible solution. Take, however, the three commas as commas with inversion, and not only are the demands of intrinsic and transcriptional probability immediately satisfied; the passage is brought into coherent connexion with the whole internal evidence supplied by the Quarto

itself as well as with that derived from kindred texts; and this evidence taken as a whole no longer stands in opposition to the conclusions now reached by scholars in their reconstruction of the history of the Shakespeare documents—we need no longer accept the view that the texts standing nearest to Shakespeare's manuscripts are those in which the punctuation is least intelligible. That the peculiarities of their punctuation, peculiarities that is when modern conventions are taken as the norm, are Shakespeare's the evidence leaves little doubt, and they are in line with what is found in the only manuscript with claims to come directly from his hand, the three pages in *Sir Thomas More*.

To Professor Dover Wilson's question the answer, I submit, must be given in the terms I have borrowed from Mr. Thiselton and Dr. Percy Simpson, for his own is clearly inadequate. The only alternative to this solution is the view that Shakespeare had no idea of the significance of such things as commas, and that his printers were equally ignorant.

Returning for a moment to *Romeo and Juliet*, some of you may now agree that the comma after 'soundly' is an internal comma for emphasis, of which there are scores in the best texts and many in this particular document itself. The external stop that we need to separate 'I have it, and soundly too' from the final words 'your houses!' is omitted, as are many similar external stops in the same text and in the Second Quarto of *Hamlet*.

In *Macbeth* the editor who prints

Making the green one, red

is hardly telling the whole truth. The Folio gives both Green and Red initial capitals. If these are for emphasis another expedient had to be found for suggesting the stress 'one' must carry—hence the comma. This is Mr. Thiselton's explanation ~~as~~ endorsed by Dr. Percy Simpson. But of course the scribe may have had the comma in his original and added the capitals.

The punctuation of two of the three passages under consideration was not for the general reader—what Shakespeare thought suitable for the public and Lord Southampton can be studied in his *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. The actors, however, would have had little difficulty, for Shakespeare was there to guide them. That they had on the whole a good grasp of his meaning such Folio texts as *Hamlet* and *2 Henry IV* clearly demonstrate; but there are errors, and some of them can be explained by supposing the scribes or actors had before them such a style of punctuation as can be found in the 'autograph' texts.

Having made a circuit of the evidence and having returned, or stumbled back, to the starting-point I now offer you a meaning for the passages—a meaning that has been accepted for generations—and an explanation, that has not been accepted, of how the true readings account for those we reject. The conclusion must be provisional till a much wider survey of Elizabethan practice at the desk and in the printing house is made available to us by scholars. The contemporary grammarians, unfortunately, help us no more in this difficulty than do the Elizabethan prosodists with the niceties of Shakespeare's versification. There has been little opportunity in the argument for the qualifications that the candid critic will, I trust, read into it. If, however, in the way of the world I have not done the justice to the views of others that I beg for my own, then I ask no better measure for myself. I am persuaded of the substantial truth of what I have said, but nevertheless—at the end I may fairly repeat the words that once introduced a much more authoritative discourse than this:

But nathelees, this meditacioun
I putte it ay under correccioun
Of clerkes, for I am nat textucel;
I take but the sentence, trusteth weel.
Therefore I make a protestacioun
That I wol stonde to correccioun.

